THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. IV. November 4, 1938 Heshvan 10, 5699 No. 13

Editorials:

THE CONTEMPORARY JEWISH RECORD
ON MAKING USE OF THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The Dilemma of the Lonely Intellectual

By Alexander J. Burnstein

Proceedings of the Reconstructionist Summer Institute

(Continued)

CORRESPONDENCE

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EDITORIALS

The Contemporary Jewish Record

WE have had and still have all sorts of Anglo-Jewish magazines, all of them having a hard struggle for existence. Most of our Anglo-Jewish magazines do not really merit support, being little more than social gossip sheets. Yet with all the magazines being published there is no periodical in English for the serious student of contemporary Jewish affairs. The American Jewish Committee is to be congratulated, therefore, for having the courage and foresight to publish a bi-monthly, which bids fair to be unequalled in the annals of Anglo-Jewish journalism. It will contain no gossip and no social notes, no advertisements and no sensational articles.

It is to be a review of events and a digest of opinion, whose aim it will be to present an objective and systematic record of Jewish events and authoritative reference material for their interpretation and understanding. *The Contemporary Jewish Record* will print articles and significant documents and will contain notices of pertinent books, pamphlets and articles and a day by day chronology of events of Jewish interest throughout the world. That there has been a long felt need for such a magazine goes without saying. Not only rabbis, scholars and teachers, but every one interested in an intelligent understanding of Jewish life, will be grateful to the American Jewish Committee for making the publication of this magazine possible.

The first number of the first volume of the *Contemporary Jewish Record* bears out all the promises of its sponsors. The articles include "A tribute to B. N. Cardozo" by Leonard Hand, the story of "Italy and the Jews" by Cecil Roth, and Jonah B. Wise's "Impressions of Evian." Important documents preserved are the "Report of Italian Professors on Racism," the "Resolution Adopted at the Evian Conference," the "Protest of Hungarian Jews against the Numerus Clausus Law," and the "Nazi Registration Law Concerning Property of Jews." In addition there is a summary review of recent events, a day-by-day chronicle of happenings of Jewish interest all over the world, and a fine annotated account of recent books, pamphlets, new periodicals and magazine articles having an important bearing on Jewish affairs.

Despite our unqualified enthusiasm for this new magazine, we should like to voice one regret concerning the new publication. Our only regret is that it was not published as a joint venture by the newly formed "Council for Jewish Rights," which includes "The American Jewish Congress," the "Bnai Brith," "The Jewish Labor Committee" and "The American Jewish

Committee." In the forty years that the American Jewish Committee has published annually the American Jewish Year Book, it has established an enviable reputation for fairness and impartiality and has given a unique chronicle of Jewish events and miscellaneous information about all of Jewish life. There is no reason why the *Contemporary Jewish Record* should not be impartial and objective. But published as it is by the American Jewish Committee, it will be humanly almost impossible not to give undue prominence to people and articles by people connected with the Committee, and to events in which the Committee figures in some measure. It may be that we are a bit squeamish, but the *Contemporary Jewish Record* strikes us as exactly the kind of a periodical which ought to be published as a non-partisan magazine by a non-partisan group such as the "Council of Jewish Rights." Its publication by the Council for Jewish Rights would be an excellent cooperative project which would redound to the honor of the Council and would become an earnest and a symbol of unity in American Jewish life.

On Making Use of the Right To Vote

NOT the least of the reasons for the retreat of democracy before fascism in the world today is to be found in the political backwardness of the electorate under capitalist democracy. Altogether too frequently the very citizen who denounces poverty, unemployment, fascism and war all year round will nevertheless fail to utilize the power which is his on Election Day to "do something" about these conditions. Political intelligence is not a universal trait under our democracy at present. How often do we hear people exclaim with a nod of the head, "Isn't it terrible!," on learning of some new reactionary advance or fascist triumph. Such people usually possess a fine sensitive nature and are the very backbone of a civilized society. Yet, unfortunately, too many such people fail to register to vote, or if they have registered, fail to vote. "My vote wouldn't make much difference anyway," is one type of excuse offered. "I hate the idea of waiting in line" is another frequent explanation. People who reason thus total in the millions in this country.

There is also a large section of the population that is backward not only politically but educationally as well. This group possesses no adequate grasp of the national and local problems on which citizens in a democracy are called upon to pass judgment. Consequently their right to vote has no meaning for them.

These two population groups constitute the weakest link in any democracy. Fascist movements find ready recruits from among them. And if it is true that a chain is as strong as its weakest link, then democracy is a government "of the people, by the people and for the people," only to the extent that the politically and educationally backward section of the population choose to make it so. Otherwise democracy becomes a government of *some* of the people, by *some* of the people, but for *all* the people.

When we consider that fascism strives to discredit democracy for this very reason, we can readily see why failure to use the ballot and to educate our friends and relatives to do likewise, is to betray the very cause of democracy as against authoritarian rule. If we are serious about preserving democracy, we must make it work; and one way to make it work is to exercise our democratic right on Election Day and thereby affirm the sovereignty of a free people. Rabbis, social workers and leaders generally would do well to agitate all year round for applying intelligence to political action.

The Dilemma of the Lonely Intellectual

By ALEXANDER J. BURNSTEIN

FOR thousands of years the sons of men have toiled, blindly but bravely, to win from a reluctant world a satisfactory explanation of life. This has been the motif underlying all religions. The desired goal of the peoples was some form of *summum bonum,* of a "divine kingdom" in which good would be realized and evil overcome. And now, mazed by modern knowledge and caught in the maelstrom of madly antagonistic ideas, the intellectuals are deserting the churches. Especially are the Jewish intellectuals deserting the synagogue. At all times there were those who idealized their hesitations and doubted their inspirations, who were proud of their ignorance and ashamed of their knowledge. The truth of the Biblical saying is not new: "In much wisdom is much grief; he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." But that so many modern intellectuals should view all religion with such high disdain and quietly abandon the religious quest and drop from the ranks, is new and discouraging. An ever increasing number of intellectuals would have us believe that men have passed beyond the circle of ideas represented by religion. Religion has ceased to be a ques-question of truth or falsehood. The contemporary intellectual man simply feels that the historic Jewish faith (or Christian faith for that matter) speaks in an archaic language which he does not understand, and which he does not care to understand. Religion is absolutely unable to command his interest. It is even unable to command his attention. At best, his symbol is Rodin's "The Thinker." No more the eager running with outstretched arms to meet the future; rather, the new intellectual is a calm, deep-eyed spectator of life's drama. He is tolerant, detached, analytical, an observer rather than an actor, a critic rather than a prophet. He is a sign of defeat and utter disillusionment.

I

Whatever may be the source of the inertia of the contemporary intellectual, certainly it does not follow a failure of nerve. For the modern intellectual is a stark realist. He faces facts frankly and fearlessly. The trouble is not that he is afraid but that his vision reaches too far. A little knowledge, and one may be a fanatical zealot; a narrow vision, and one may be a bigot; with sufficiently enlarged knowledge, zeal and bigotry give place to tolerance, understanding, and, perhaps, for a time, to inaction. It is not an easy thing to build a new religious world-view. It requires a fine courage to keep a religious idealism while the old dogmas and sanctions are emptied of all meaning by the new knowledge, and while ancient authorities and the authentic voices of the past become involved in relativity. The intellectual sees them in historical perspective but he has no convictions and no commanding moral or spiritual enthusiasm. For, it is one thing to walk firmly from beneath the security of the old, to spurn the futility of world solutions of practical problems, to scorn the cant of conventional phrases; it is another and more difficult thing to chart a plain path through the complexity of the modern world. That the intellectual should be amused by the heroics of orthodoxy is natural. It should be just as clear why he smiles at the seriousness of the so-called "practical men" who blindly drag our civilization through the slough of despond toward anarchy and chaos with no idea either of the problems of living or of their solution. Indeed he would prefer to be called a "dreamer", as one who resolutely refuses to accept this "practical" world as final and dares to believe that intelligence may, despite the grim

*Rabbi, Newark, N. J.

brutalities and hostilities of an alien world, find a way to the realization of the good life. In the meantime, by the orthodox, he is accused of pride, by the zealot branded as a scoffer, by the naive optimist scorned as a cynic. Out of that babel of tongues, he has risen, through the path of understanding, not proud, nor a mocker, nor cynical, but a spectator; and the temptation is strong upon him quietly to watch the play.

II

Perhaps the indecision and the cool and assured indifference of the modern intellectual are to be found in his passion for freedom. He thinks that he regards all values as relative. But in reality he is a fanatic for the value of freedom. The human spirit is beating against the bars in every part of modern civilized society, and the terrible egoism of narrow nationalism, the incredible repressions of the individual life in every land and clime, the pseudo-idealistic megalomania of the totalitarian State and the sense of the menace to freedom everywhere, have led many an intellectual to distrust any and every kind of loyalty. And the Jewish intellectual, more restless, critical and analytical than any, is afraid of being bound by any relationship, political, social or religious that seems imposed from without. He sees the selfishness and imperfection in every community which demands his loyalty, and he is sensitive to the limitation of the principle of loyalty itself. He thinks men can be happy only if they are emancipated from every loyalty and restraint except one which they impose upon themselves. His fanatic devotion to the principle of freedom blinds him to the social character of life. He does not realize that our problem is not how free we can be, but how free we can be in our several bondages.

For the achievement of freedom is not the end, but only the very beginning of the far journey, and the highest character develops not in complete emancipation, but in the achievement of liberty within terms of our various social obligations. No gregarious enthusiasm for the whole human race which is *disloyal* to the real and true and permanent elements and qualities in any national culture is a constructive attitude. The cosmopolitan, who has become incapable of being a patriot, will find sooner or later that very ignoble elements will enter into his cosmopolitanism. One instrument in an orchestra would not improve the quality of the orchestra by ceasing to be itself and trying to be another instrument. The wind instruments cannot do the work of the violins. Our larger loyalties include our smaller loyalties; they do not repudiate them. The isolated Jewish soul that has no framework of solidarity or solidity, withers like the cut flower.

In a sense, the World War left Vienna, before the Nazi aggressive invasion, a capital without a country. A city once outstanding in Europe for its brilliancy, its artistic zest, its scientific flare, and its gay, vivid life, found itself like a head without a body. It was a center without a circle. It was a metropolis without an organism from which to receive sustenance and through which to express its own driving energies.

Many a cultivated mind in the modern world finds himself in a strangely similar position to that of Vienna after the war. He has clear and scintillating thoughts about life. He has masterful energies ready to be used for great tasks. He has a certain understanding of the significance of the past, of what ought to be done, and of what ought to be the possibilities of the future. But somehow his relation to his environment is confused and bewildering and utterly ineffective. Like Hamlet, he feels that the times are out of joint. And as he analyzes the uncriticized social utopias of the dauntless dreamers who are realistic and critically skillful in analyzing the present, but utterly uncritical and romantic in respect of their favorite dreams, he sees in their

loudly shouted prescriptons and messianic formulas no real promise of a better world. He is too profound to be a social revolutionist, too honest and earnest to remain content with a corrupt place in a corrupt society, and he sees no adequate way in which to achieve a good life for himself or a good impact upon the life of the world. And so the modern intellectual feels as if he lived in a capital without a country.

III

But can the modern intellectual abandon the ancient dream of the human race? Can he forever suspend judgment and refuse the responsibility of making an ordered world in which man may realize a more creative and abundant life? In all ages the idea of changing human nature or the world has been rejected by some astute sceptics, laughing hedonists, sophisticated epicureans and skin-clad hermits. Even the religious philosophers often despaired of *this* earth and sought the ideal in another world. How much more hopeless, then, appears the problem before the weary outlook of the civilized mind! The foundations of our brilliant material civilization are shaken to the ground. Our proud security has departed. Our boasted progress has betrayed us. Political fabrics are falling. Social fabrics are breaking apart, and everywhere there is the human lust for power and the hard sordid ways of men with men. The temptation to remain merely a spectator is very real. An argument may be made for it; it may be stated thus:

The problem of achieving a meaningful life for man is not a Jewish, nor a French, nor an American problem but a world problem, for now all mankind is bound into one bundle of life by the ties of social and economic interests. To face the task of lifting the weight of ignorance and stupidity from these vast throngs of human kind so that they may participate in a world of common spiritual values is staggering even to the imagination. Long ago China, India, Greece and Rome accepted a cleavage between the ignorant masses and the cultured intellectuals—a chasm which they could not hope to bridge, and even the Jews frankly faced the distinction between the *am haarez* and the *talmid haham.* Shall modern man attempt to lift the weight of the whole world? To do it, moreover, in the face of the opposition and ingratitude of the very masses whom he would serve, and who have no possible understanding of the glories of the unknown promised land?

The problem appears more difficult today because psychology has shown how deeply entrenched in social structure are the customs, habits and emotional attitudes of people. Robert Louis Stevenson has spun a wonderful allegory of a tribe of men who were persuaded that it was foolish to wear shackles on their right ankles and so they removed them; but they soon wearied of their freedom and clamped them on their left ankles on the following days. The history of religion gives ample confirmation of this human failing. Age after age brave dreamers and prophets have preached beautiful gospels of justice, love and brotherhood. They passed; the ancient customs remained. For more than twenty-five centuries the gleaming ideal of human brotherhood and peace has been held aloft in both the Eastern and Western worlds, but now the dream is discarded by hosts of men, the golden words are lost, and selfishness and brutality persist with a kind of ghastly travesty of life. Only a scientific technique which shall replace old customs with new, establish new objects for old emotions, and put the ideal into the habits of men can ever hope to make of the world a co-operating social democracy. Is there any social psychology wise enough for the task?

Still more disheartening looms the vastness of the problems involved. Made aware by the specialized research in each particular field of human experience of

the endless details of every problem, the modern intellectual also knows that every problem is inextricably interwoven with many others equally complex. Where then is the synthesis of knowledge which may make possible any adequate understanding of the full significace of any issue of human life? Where is the philosopher who, with synoptic vision, can project the human goal?

In the light of all this, the intellectual, weary of words without meaning, of doctrines without any concrete realization, is totally unwilling to commit himself without reserve to any idyllic utopia or panacea for the healing of the world's woe. He knows only too well that there is no single plan, no magic means of banishing the ills and maladjustments of the social order. He knows that it is a long, staggering and well-nigh impossible task, a work of intricate and burdensome experimentation ever threatened by chance and futility.

Moreover, in the universe as it is known to the cultivated mind there can be no final solution. The task is endless, for every solution merely sets a new problem which calls for new analysis and new effort. A growing, evolving world ever moving in time to increased complexity gives no promise of a future age of perfect repose. Who shall guarantee that all our toil and wisdom shall not be tomorrow's encumbering and worthless wreckage? Why then should men break their hearts to achieve transiency and what is but of passing moment?

It is not difficult to understand why the blazing fires of enthusiasm begin to burn more quietly in the daylight of deeper knowledge; nor why men stand grim and bewildered, vacillating amid the most cruel and bitter dilemmas of life. Is the intellectual then doomed to be only a spectator, timid and hesitant before the complexity of the problems of the modern world? Some remain bewildered, perplexed, and never recover completely from that spell of detachment and deadening indifference. Others may harden into cold and bitter cynicism and drag out their remaining days in a world without hope and without light. In the worst sense of the word they may become dwellers in the City of Dreadful Night. They may turn from life itself with scornful and angry repudiation. They may even choose suicide as the final and irrevocable way of expressing their utter disgust with life. Gilbert K. Chesterton once described suicide as spitting in the face of the universe. And in this very sense, men may turn at bay to defy the life in whose experience they have found no happy fruition, and to seek the death in which they at least express their scorn of living.

But the bravest will not take this way out. The most honest will not seek this inglorious exit from the adventure of living. Our deepest disappointment is, after all, with ourselves, and we cannot give that tragic sense of failure a worthy expression by blaming our environment. The worst environment gives an opportunity to rise above defeatism and cowardice, and nothing so tests a man as his action when confronted with failure, for the way he carries his defeats and disappointments. So the brave intellectual presses on in his religious quest. Disillusioned, stripped of all easy optimism, he continues his search for spiritual emancipation, and becomes an active participant in those movements that hold out the promise for some sort of social hope. Why? Because to be a spectator from the heights of scientific knowledge upon the human scene is to be endlessly tortured by the pain of futility. To be a cynic smiling sadly upon the millions caught in the cruel net of a heartless civilization is inhuman. That fault dethronged the gods of old. The human way, consecrated by the anguish of the centuries, is to love life and accept the responsibility for making some spot lovely —at the call of imprisoned, suffering men to push open a door into the sunlight— amid a crumbling world, torn by mortal

agony and pain, to dry a human tear. In this is no ultimate basis, no cosmic philosophy, no secret of permanence or stability. It is simply a pragmatic attitude—to face the bewildering facts of the world fearlessly, to throw off the inertia of discouragement and to try again for a piecemeal solution of the nearest and most pressing problems. So in every city and in every countryside, multitudes of thinking men and women are joining scores of "movements" that are trying to achieve reorganization of fragments of our broken world. But all the while, like Banquo's ghost, the quest for certainty, and the strange and terrible spiritual surmise return, and the intellectual is really lonely and restless and anxious at heart.

IV

I need hardly add that the case of the Jewish intellectual is even more pathetic. The ideals of "liberty, equality and fraternity" that completely dominated his thinking and captured his imagination only a decade ago, have been well nigh demolished by a quick succession of crises of growing violence. His hopes of indeterminate moral and social progress have turned out to be apples of Sodom. He frequently shouts to keep up his courage. But there is a deep void and emptiness within. With startled eyes he looks out on a dizzy world. He did not count upon the earthquake which might shake to the ground the palaces of our scientific and material civilization. He did not understand that the things he trusted most might have no secret of permanence, and the things he discarded might have the power of eternity in their grasp.

In his misery, and in his longing for a safe anchorage, he frequently turns to those gallant religious ideas and ideals which kept the soul of the Jew alive for hope and inspiration. But here, too, he experiences frustration and disappointment. The tenets of Orthodoxy, despite its many profound insights and perspectives, he cannot accept because its religious truths are expressed in an inadequate form and are imbedded in irrelevant precepts. He will not amputate his lges in order that he may walk a tight rope, and he will not cut off his arms in order that he may climb a high tree. Nor can he find peace and security in the average decadent liberal Synagogue, because the latter only too frequently capitulates and surrenders to the chaotic contemporary mind, and in adjusting itself to the characteristic tendencies and prejudices of modernity, loses the grandeur, the determining, commanding and creative impulse of truly great religion. So he remains bewildered, lonely and sad within.

Looking now at the causes of his dissatisfaction and unhappiness we note that perhaps the main difficulty of the Jewish intellectual lies in his unusual dissociation from the masses of the Jewish people. The educated, the cultured world is, of course, everywhere in danger of losing its contact with the broader currents of human life and experience. But in the leading countries of the world and even in New England, there has been an uninterrupted development of national culture, disturbed at times, retarded, warped by external factors, yet in the main a continuous growth. There has at least been no violent break in tradition, from the Niebelungenlied to Goethe and Hauptman, from Beowulf to Browning and Tennyson, from Tacitus to Renan, from Plato to Santayana, from Aristotle to Kant and Herbert Spencer, from Emerson to Paul Elmer More. The literature, science, philosophy and ethics of today are intimately connected with past traditions, out of which they have been gradually developed.

But among us, where the learned class has, since the latter half of the past century, been reared upon an alien cultrue, this separation, this detachment from the main currents of Jewish thought is really alarming. The Emancipation severed all connections with the Jewish past, raised a wall between the learned and the masses; there is no common medium to unite them, and the

Hebrew language, in which the treasures of Jewish thought and expression repose, is remote and foreign to the mind of most Jewish intellectuals. The intimate ideas, images, notions that appeal to the Jewish masses and are derived from Jewish traditions are, therefore, strange and perplexing to the contemporary Jewish mind steeped as it is in the culture of the Western world. But the Jewish intellectual, if he desires to overcome his loneliness and find group fulfillment and self-realization, must draw nearer to his people, must steep himself again in the native lore, in the needs and feelings of his silent, suffering brethren.

Secondly, the Jewish intellectual, to redeem himself from his present misery and unhappiness, must acquire the religious sense of existence. For the modern world, despite its marvelous scientific and industrial progress, lacks depth, the religious consciousness of human life and destiny. Modern evil is so fearful because it is the product not of wickedness but of superficiality. The horror of Fascism, for example, is most of all its smart and ruthless efficiency. Its devildom is chromium-plated; its violence is streamlined. The advent of capitalist machine-production in the early part of the last century has brought into existence a demonic and atheistic power, which moves irresistibly forward to disaster by its own momentum. Man has in the last one hundred years veritably changed his nature a thousandfold for the worse, not because he is, as an individual, morally and spiritually more depraved, but because he has become hardly an individual at all. The physical and productive power with which a mechanized society endows him collectively, diminishes and weakens his individual reality to the zero point. Hence the apparently challenging and difficult demand that, if man is to remain approximately at the level of decency, he must recapture the religious view of humanity. Now, the seeing and promulgation of this truth—the actual situation of man in an evil and corrupt society—is the function of the religious imagination: preeminently of Jewish theology. It is here that the Synagogue has failed, and failed terribly, to harness the intellect to the religious imagination, to make religion central to its teachings and to make reason the very law of its operations.

It is true, "it is one of the hardest tasks in the world to make new intellectual ideas harmonize truly with the religious life, to place them in their right light for that life. The moments when such a change is accomplished are epochs in religious history; the men through whose instrumentality it is accomplished are great religious reformers. The greatness of these men does not consist in their having these new ideas, in their originating them. . . . The greatness of a religious reformer consists in his reconciling them with the religious life, in his starting this life upon a fresh period in company with them. No such religious reformer of the present age has yet shown himself. Till he appears, the true religious teacher is he who, not yet reconciling all things, at least esteems things still in their due order, and makes his hearers so esteem them; who, shutting his mind against no ideas brought by the spirit of his time, sets these ideas, in the spirit of the religious life, in their right prominence, and still puts that first which is first; who under the pressure of new thoughts, keeps the centre of the religious life where it should be."

That was written by Matthew Arnold seventy-five years ago, in an appreciation of Dean Stanley's book on the Synagogue. Like all utterances of truly great minds on particular occasions, its scope and significance far exceed that of the occasion itself. In those words, it seems to me, Matthew Arnold posited with prophetic insight the true problem of the modern world. It is a religious and spiritual problem. Matthew Aronld felt it with a deep urgency in 1863. It is far more deeply urgent today.

Nor do I believe that we, as Jews, can continue to suffer greatly without turning to a religious formulation. For, if people do not seek to understand their suffering, their very suffering becomes inhuman. And from the beginning of humanity itself, I believe, men have sought to understand their suffering; and in this effort their humanity consisted. The proper understanding of suffering is religion: above all, it is the Jewish religion that was born in affliction and cradled in agony and pain. Precisely that—an understanding of its suffering—is what Israel gropes after today. The answers are legion, and all of them are true, in part. But none are simple enough, or deep enough. The deep and simple truth is that Israel must begin to utilize its sufferings for its own purification and for definite spiritual ends, becoming once more the Lord's Suffering Servant, seeking to rekindle the dwindling religious life in humanity.

I do not know what is to befall the world. But I fear a terrible lapse into barbarism which is beyond the power to imagine. Let the Jewish intellectual ask himself what can save him from loneliness, despair and barbarity in a grim, chaotic world? The answer must be a recovery of our ancient faith, a new respect for the central stream of historic Judaism. There is in it, despite its many weaknesses, follies and failures, the greatness, the splendor, the intellectual and spiritual riches of thirty centuries of Jewish thought. There is a divine fire at the heart of it. And you can never tell when that fire will burst into flame. With it, we can hope, do battle and find ultimate fulfillment. Without it, life becomes "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Proceedings of the Reconstructionist Summer Institute

(Continued from our last issue)

THE Sunday afternoon session was presided over by Rabbi Ira Eisenstein who opened the meeting as follows:

"This afternoon's session is devoted to some problems facing Jewish community organization in America. We heard this morning from Mr. Duker a very scholarly and comprehensive survey of efforts made heretofore to organize American Jewish communal activities. His paper was followed by Mr. Shetzer's remarkable description of the functioning of the Detroit Jewish Community Council. I am certain that all of you who heard that paper were amazed that *it really could be done,* that somewhere in this country the Jews were enlightened enough and sensitive enough to their own problem to construct a type of organization that was indigenous to this country, a typical American product, but nevertheless rooted in a point of view which reaches back to former generations.

"We come together with this background of efforts that have been made in the past, and at least one effort that is being made at this time to incorporate what we believe to be the Reconstructionist point of view into concrete organizational form. From that point of view Judaism is more than a religious community; it is a social organism and the only logical form for its organization is one that takes cognizance of all the needs of the Jews. The Reconstructionist philosophy and program is best exemplified in the Community Council, or the community organizational concept. The congregational idea or form implies that Judaism is a religion, and a religion only. The philanthropic set-up is at best an anomolous one; it is not based on any clearly

conceived notion of what the Jews are. The Zionist set-up implies, to a great extent, the repudiation of the diaspora. The creation of the Community Council is, on the other hand, the true embodiment of our point of view, that the Jews have common interests, social, economic, spiritual, cultural; that adherence to a creed can no longer be the criterion of Jewish loyalty; that any Jew who identifies himself with the Jewish group is thereby entitled to all the rights and privileges of living with the Jewish group.

"The community council is democratic. It is democratic not only because it gives each one a voice in the government of the Jewish community, but because it realizes a much more fundamental principle of democracy, namely mutual responsibility. When the community council will have organized itself most efficiently, we will see the day when Jews who do not happen to have children will nevertheless feel as responsible for the maintenance of Jewish education as those who do; when people who do not happen to have old parents or grandparents will feel as responsible for the maintenance of homes for the aged as those who do. I was asked this morning, 'What is the relationship between Reconstructionism and the whole problem of community organization?' This is the relationship.

"We found this morning that it *could be done*. But the very fact that we marvel so at the accomplishment of the Detroit Jews implies that it cannot be done everywhere. What we want to explore are the problems facing Jewish community organization in America. What are the obstacles which impede this development in other cities? In preparing this program, we thought of three major difficulties: (1) the variety of conceptions of what it means to be a Jew, (2) the problems presented by economic differences, the so-called class-struggle, and (3) the tendency of institutions to resist encroachments on their autonomy. Our first speaker, Mr. Bernard G. Richards, is a well-known journalist, and a man who for many years was identified with the work of the American Jewish Congress. Our second speaker, Rabbi Michael Alper, is an editor of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST and a man who has been functioning in one of those institutions that have had to face the problem of yielding some of their sovereign rights to a larger agency. Our third speaker, Mr. Louis Kraft, is acting director of the Jewish Welfare Board and as such is in a strategic position to observe the tenor of Jewish thought and activity throughout the country." —

Mr. Richards was then called upon to answer the question: "What are the possibilities of common action despite different conceptions of the nature of the Jewish group?" * He affirmed that it was possible for different sections of American Jewry, holding divergent points of view, to unite and work together for the protection of the rights of Jews and the furtherance of their general interests. But to achieve such collaboration it is necessary that certain pressing, immediate needs be given precedence over far-off idealistic ends. He urged recognition of the distinction between unity of thought and unity of action; acquiescence should be sought only in regard to concrete tasks, while principles and theories be held in abeyance, each group remaining free to entertain and advocate its own point of view. He then proceeded to illustrate these points by a historic review of the relations of the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress and their respective constituencies and adherents from the preliminary discussions on the organization of the united American Jewish Congress in 1918 to the organization, shortly before the Institute was held, of the General Council of Jewish Rights, representing the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the B'nai B'rith and the Jewish Labor Committee. Mr. Richards showed how the establishment of this Council, like previous efforts at collaboration among the organizations represented

* The addresses of Mr. Richards, Rabbi Alper and Mr. Kraft will be published in full in later issues.

was the result of public pressure reflecting a growing sentiment for unity and impatience with divisive attitudes. Whether the present Council will succeed in effecting the continuous collaboration of all the elements it represents will depend largely on the functioning of a vigorous Jewish press that will keep the public interested in and informed about everything that vitally concerns the Jewish people.

Rabbi Michael Alper spoke on "The possibilities for common action despite differences of economic class." He pointed out that, as long as economic and political action is precluded by the recently formed General Council for Jewish Rights as well as by the Jewish Community Councils, Federations and Welfare Funds throughout the country, nothing of more radical significance will be accomplished than has already been accomplished. Declaring that the historic role of President Roosevelt and the New Deal is to show that the capitalist system cannot function adequately any longer and pointing to the slowly developing realignment throughout the country of progressives vs. reactionaries regardless of party labels, Rabbi Alper foresaw a similar development before long within organized Jewish life. The cleavage, he claimed, will come to a head with the attempt on the part of organized Jewish workers and their middle-class sympathizers to democratize the management and control of Jewish institutional life. He foretold that before long, the more politically advanced Jews in the constituency of the General Council for Jewish Rights would begin to realize the futility of continuing to operate on the assumption that the present social-economic set-up in America could or would last indefinitely. An ever-growing minority in each of the constituent organizations, with the lead taken perhaps by the members of the Jewish Labor Committee, would urge a more realistic program of attacking the root causes of organized anti-Semitism, and of other persecutions of minorities both in this country and abroad. Increasing demand would be heard for the shifting of the base of operations from that of combatting symptoms and applying palliatives to that of exposing and rectifying the economic maladjustments in our body politic. This articulate group would reason that the most effective and decisive approach to the problem of guaranteeing equal rights to the Jews, at least in this country, is to democratize American life, more especially to use the instruments of political democracy in order to effect a greater measure of economic democracy. Because he thought an intensification of class-consciousness bound to develop, Rabbi Alper urged a united front on the part of the Jewish middle class and working class against the financial, fascist-minded oligarchy now largely in control of Jewish communal life.

The next speaker, Louis Kraft, discussed "The Possibilities of Common Action Despite the Tendency to Restriction of Institutional Autonomy." He began by analyzing the reasons why many institutions are apprehensive lest efforts at community organization would have a bad effect on their specific Jewish interests. Some are afraid that community organization may involve a regimentation and standardization that would interfere with experiment and growth. Others fear that the validity of what they are doing may be called into question. Organizations that have property and capital funds often resist community organization in their desire to protect these funds and insure their continued control over them. Local branches or units of national organizations often fear that they may be subjected to a divided and conflicting loyalty as between their obligations to the national organization and to the local community. Many are alarmed at the thought of an all inclusive Jewish community organization because they have forebodings that it may tend to segregate Jewry from the gentile population in a sort of ghetto. The strength of these fears, most of which Mr. Kraft regarded as groundless, he found evidenced by the fact that the constitution of almost every Federation, Chest, Community Council or

Welfare Fund began with an assurance that the freedom of action of constituent organizations was fully assured.

While recognizing that the voluntary character of Jewish community organization necessitated the guarantee to constituent organizations of a large measure of autonomy, Mr. Kraft held that this should not preclude cooperation, collaboration and joint action. The attempt to reckon with both these needs has resulted in a considerable variation among different communities in the degree of integration that exists. Among activities that were engaged in by the community organization as a whole, the most general was that of fund-raising. The benefits of central fund-raising were so obvious that organizations did not regard the delegation of fund-raising to a central body as a serious infringement of their autonomy. But Mr. Kraft saw indications of a growing appreciation of the relation of fund-raising to community planning. Another area of substantial co-operation is in the field of community action, particularly in defense against anti-Semitism. Mr. Kraft commended community organization for better planning for the advantageous use of the community's resources of facilities, personnel, and funds to create a dynamic, progressive Jewish life. To this end encouragement must be given to Jewish education, the synagogue, the Jewish Center and other cultural forces, in a way that would recognize and respect their differences. Jewish community organization was needed to fill out the gaps in the community's program and engage in necessary activities that the separate organizations cannot carry out themselves.

The final conclusion to which Mr. Kraft came after his careful survey of the areas in which co-operation among various local Jewish institutions has been or should be instituted was that a community organization, "democratic in structure and community wide in scope" was needed and would allay all fears of infringement on institutional autonomy. In such a community, "All activities will be directed toward the common good. Of course, some organizations will be compelled to change their work, others will be merged with like organizations and some may have to abandon outmoded functions. New enterprises will have to meet the test of need before they are launched. This will happen in a community organization that is not founded upon the preservation of the status quo but is organic and dynamic. We live in a world of change and our institutional and organizational life must be adapted to change."

At the conclusion of Mr. Kraft's address, the chairman called for discussion from the floor both of the papers read in the morning session and those which had just been delivered.

MR. ISRAEL CHIPKIN: Mr. Shetzer this morning made reference to an action taken by the Detroit Council which illustrates a decision made to sponsor morally the cultural program of the Yiddishist group. I am curious to know how the Hebraists, the assimilationists and the so-called "American" type agreed to sponsor a program for which they have no use.

MR. SIMON *S*CETZER: The Council itself was not sponsoring the Yiddishist program but merely lent its influence to help those groups co-ordinate their activities. The individual leadership was not able to obtain that necessary coordination without the Community Council's assistance. A Yiddishist organization of a national character with a specific communist program sought infiltration. That was probably the determining factor. It won the support of the Hebraist groups because I thought it would be establishing a precedent. If the Zionist groups should come to the Council and ask for simliar support, they would have to give it.

MR. FRIEDLAND inquired into the method of initiating a Community Council.

MR. SHETZER. A few years ago the creation of a community council became almost inevitable. As a consequence of a process of development, we had learned to appreciate the value of joint enterprise. There was considerable discussion of community councils in the Yiddish press and the Anglo-Jewish press. Then there was a speakers' bureau explaining the purposes of the community council. We also

have a surfeit of radio programs and we have all the time we require for clarification of our objectives. When we had our constitution prepared, we sent a draft of it to every one of the organizations in the city we thought would be eligible for membership under the tentative draft. We advised them that members of the provisional committee were available to explain the organization to them. Then we called a first conference to which each organization was entitled to send one delegate. The various organizations came with a specific list of changes that they wanted made.

DR. JACOB GOLUB: The chairman mentioned the various hindrances to community organization and listed a number of points of view; the congregational point of view, the philanthropic point of view, and then the Zionistic point of view. It seems to me that the suggestion of the Zionists as hindrances to community organization is entirely uncalled for in view of the fact that in American Jewish life the Zionists take a very active part. As Mr. Shetzer will tell you, the Zionist Organization everywhere is active in creating community councils.

(Addressing himself to Rabbi Alper): Granting that there is going to be a sharpening of class division, will this necessarily affect Jewish communities in the way that Rabbi Alper suggests? If there should be disappointment with the New Deal and a growing realization on the part of Jews that we need a more Left solution of the Jewish problem, there will undoubtedly be more anti-Semitism. The very forces that tend to disrupt Jewish life will then tend to emphasize the need for Jewish unity.

RABBI ALPER: I deliberately did not want to go too much into prophecy. My own guess is that we who are in the middle class now should try to come closer with the extreme left wing of the People's Committee.

DR. GOLUB: Rabbi Alper overlooks the fact that our institutions are maintained by voluntary contributions of which 80 per cent or more come from the rich.

MR. RICHARDS (to Rabbi Alper): Are we not justified in going ahead with the organization of Jews to do what we can for the Jewish people and leave everything else to our duties as American citizens, which we never fail to fulfill?

A number of other persons asked for the floor at this point but, owing to the lateness of the hour it was necesary to adjourn the session.

(To be concluded)

Correspondence

Sirs:

The paraphrase of the *piyut "Amiz Koah"* by Rabbi Eugene Kohn in your issue of October 7, 1938, is a commendable effort—for its own intrinsic merit and even more for what it adumbrates. (May we be premitted to say, "Yeyasher amiz koheko"?)

Certainly, unless one's major interest is in Mediaeval poetry or in our liturgy, there is little point to struggling to pierce the arcana of our *piyut* during the greater part of the year. And I have long since given up the not-too-flattering exercise, during the Holy Days, of pitting my poor powers against the overwhelming inscrutability of the Family Kalonymos, Kalir, and their fellow *paiytanim.* As a matter of fact, I fear I neglected the *piyut* entirely this *Rosh ha-Shanah,* to read a foreword to the *mahzor* in which its redactor, after discussing the lives of Kalonymos *pere et fils,* was constrained to state that their works were *"kebedim lehabin."*

The interesting aspect of Rabbi Kohn's paraphrase, above and beyond what it does to the *Amiz Koah,* is what it may mean in the way of a revivified prayerbook.

It is a sad commentary on Jewish religious life in America that we have so long tolerated the atrocious 'revised translation' (one is tempted to imagine the 'unrevised' version) appearing in the Schlesinger prayerbooks published in Vienna. One cannot blame the young American, unacquainted with Hebrew, for turning from the book in disgust. The London prayerbook represents a great advance; at least its English is intelligible, and the translations in verse by Zangwill, Salaman and Davis of various prayers bring to it the merit of varia-

tion, though at times verging perilously close to doggerel.

Yet literate English is the least to be expected in an English-speaking country. The repulsion felt by that same hypothetical young American for the barbarisms of the Vienna English translation must also be felt by him for the equal barbarisms of the London English content. We have proceeded past the day when the efficacy of prayer can be considered to bear in any other direction than within and upon the worshiper. It is obvious that prayer, to be of greatest value, must voice the needs, represent the aspirations, portray and relieve the soul of the devotee. *Prayer cannot be vital if it be not relevant. . . .* It is even more obvious that our liturgy has so little that falls within this description. To the person who is far from belief in a personal Deity—and his number is legion—what value can there be in repeated and fulsome praises of an anthropomorphic Being, in the recondite allusions of the over-erudite *paiytanim,* in the classificatory completeness of the *al het* and the *ashamnu,* in the iterations, reiterations and repetitions of thought, of prayers, of *amidah,* and since we are talking of prayers and prayers constitute the major part of our service, of the Second Day? Speaking for myself, I find my universalist and theological views set forth in the *adon olam,* my nationalist feelings expressed in the *alenu,* (both paragraphs), my esthetic sentiments gratified in some of the Psalms and most of the *haftarot;* as for the rest, I frequently find myself wishing for the ingenious Tibetan device of the prayer-wheel, with the result that, truth to tell, I less and less frequently find myself in the synagogue.

And that is the great pity. The young American Jew should, and can, not only find himself in the synagogue—he should, and can, *lose* himself in the synagogue; but that will never happen so long as our present prayerbook remains as it is. We will have to revamp our translations, paraphrase them, give them direct relevancy to the life of today, present to those of our community who not only speak the language, but think in terms of today's America, the opportunity to express their souls in their houses of worship as men and women living now and here, not centuries ago in the ghettos of Mediaeval Europe or in the *azarot* of the Temple.

I understand that the Rabbinical Assembly is contemplating a High Holiday prayerbook publication. Also, your account of the Reconstructionist Summer Institute indicates serious attention given this matter. The doubts as to the wisdom of changing the prayers in Hebrew seem to be based on sound psychological grounds, although certainly the content of our prayers, no matter what the language, cries for revision. But in any event, far-reaching change of the liturgy in English—whether in juxtaposition to the Hebrew or in supplements—is, and has been for years—most urgently called for.

I am not naive enough to think that a prayerbook made to express, in stirring, eloquent, and dignified English the needs and inner experiences of our day will bring our American born generations thronging to the synagogue. It will take more than that. The services as such, also need substantial overhauling. The circumambulating roulades of the exhibitionist *hazan* can well be pruned; the decorum of the congregation can be heightened; the ceremony of the ritual can be made more deliberate and "high-church"; the Sefardic absence of the *hazarat ha-shaz* can also he emulated; congregational singing, as against congregational caterwauling, can be organized and extended. But revision of the content of the prayer book is a prime necessity and has long been overdue.

There remains the difficulty, as appears to have been pointed out at your Institute, that these matters are of import only to those who remain loyal to the synagogue regardless, and that any changes would be made for those others who would in any event remain indifferent. But among synagogue-goers are many whose interest, intelligence and sincerity deserve far better treatment than they receive, whose continued loyalty is an asset which should not be imperiled, and who number among themselves those whose tie with the synagogue, continually growing more tenuous, can thus be lengthened and perhaps preserved. Certainly, with our adolescents, a relevant prayerbook may be the determining factor in their deciding whether to attend or neglect. At very least, the present anachronistic versions should not be allowed to continue to mock the willing worshiper, making him remain to scoff who came to pray.

D. I. KAP, New York, N.Y.